

Leo Strauss

Plato's Gorgias (1973)

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Note: Only one audio file from this course, of the second session, is available. Leo Strauss died on October 18, 1973.

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Preface to Plato's *Gorgias*

Devin Stauffer

Leo Strauss taught two seminars at the University of Chicago on Plato's *Gorgias*, the first in the winter quarter of 1957 and the other six years later, in the fall quarter of 1963. He was also teaching a seminar on Plato's *Gorgias* at St. John's College in Annapolis in the fall of 1973 when he died. Only the transcript of the 1957 course remains, whereas there are audiotapes of the 1963 course and of a single session (what appears to be the second meeting) of the 1973 seminar at St. John's. When he died rather suddenly in 1973, Strauss was not only in the midst of teaching the seminar on the *Gorgias* but had also begun work on an essay on the *Gorgias* which he intended to include in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*. Since we have a tape of only one session of the 1973 seminar, and since both that seminar and his work on an essay on the *Gorgias* were cut short by his death, students and scholars of Strauss must rely for access to his interpretation of the dialogue primarily on the two earlier courses. Both have now been edited.

When Strauss gave his first seminar on the *Gorgias* in 1957, he was finishing one of his greatest works, certainly his deepest and most detailed statement on a modern author: *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, published in 1958. Strauss dated the Preface, which appears to have been written after the completion of the rest of the work, as December of 1957. We can assume then that in the fall of 1957 Strauss was in the final stage of his work on *Thoughts on Machiavelli*ⁱ, and thus that Machiavelli was still very much on his mind as he was teaching the *Gorgias*. A note late in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* can perhaps provide a clue to a connection between Strauss's work on Machiavelli and his interest in the *Gorgias*: Note 219 to chapter 4 comes in an important section near the very end of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* where Strauss compares Machiavelli's thought, especially regarding the status or meaning of philosophy, with the thought of "the classics." This is the section of the work in which Strauss is most explicitly critical of Machiavelli. He argues that the consequence of Machiavelli's analysis of the political "as if it were not ordered toward the supra-political or as if the supra-political did not exist" is "an enormous simplification and, above all, the appearance of the discovery of a hitherto wholly unsuspected whole continent" (295). "A stupendous contraction of the horizon appears to Machiavelli and his successors as a wondrous enlargement of the horizon" (295; see also 173, 296–98). "The classics," by contrast, who "understood the moral-political phenomena in the light of man's highest perfection," insisted on judging the city by "its openness, or deference, to philosophy." Yet, since they also understood why the city is necessarily closed to philosophy, the classical philosophers regarded themselves as separated from the city, that is, from the *demos* in the sense of "the totality of citizens who are incapable or unwilling to defer to philosophy," by "a gulf" (295–96). Strauss then writes: "The gulf can be bridged only by a noble rhetoric which we may call for the

ⁱ Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

time being accusatory or punitive rhetoric. Philosophy is incapable of supplying this kind of rhetoric. It cannot do more than sketch its outlines. The execution must be left to orators or poets.” It is at the end of this last statement that Strauss places note 219, which reads: “The quest for this kind of noble rhetoric, as distinguished from the other kind discussed in the *Phaedrus*, is characteristic of the *Gorgias*.” (Strauss also asks his readers to consider Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 1074b1–4, where Aristotle refers to an ancient tradition of myths that describe the heavenly bodies as gods and the whole of nature as pervaded by the divine, and he points back to pages 125–26 of his own text, where he discusses a subdued criticism that Machiavelli makes of Livy for allowing his judgments to be shaped by moral considerations, a criticism which prepares Machiavelli’s “criticism of authority as such.”)

If this note to *Thoughts on Machiavelli* provides us with a lead in trying to grasp the connection between his first course on the *Gorgias* and his main work at the time, the connection between the second course and his writing at the time is more straightforward and direct. In the fall of 1963, Strauss was finishing *The City and Man*, published in 1964, and he had already begun work on *Socrates and Aristophanes*. Although he did not publish *Socrates and Aristophanes* until 1966, he wrote in 1962 in a letter to Alexander Kojève: “I am preparing for publication three lectures on the city and man, dealing with the *Politics*, the *Republic* and Thucydides. Only after these things have been finished will I be able to begin with my real work, an interpretation of Aristophanes” (see *On Tyranny: Revised and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss–Kojève Correspondence*, 309). Since one of the three main parts of *The City and Man* deals with the *Republic*, a dialogue that Strauss regarded as closely connected to the *Gorgias*—most immediately because the question of justice is central to both dialogues, but also because both treat the relationship between philosophy and politics—the relevance of the *Gorgias* to *The City and Man* is obvious. But the *Gorgias* may also have been of interest to Strauss in connection with his “real work,” his interpretation of Aristophanes, since the theme or question of rhetoric plays an important role in that work. In many passages of *Socrates and Aristophanes*, Strauss examines Aristophanes’ critique of Socrates for his imprudence and his failure adequately to appreciate the need for a rhetoric that would protect both philosophy and the city from the dangers each poses to the other. In fact, a part—not the whole, but an important part—of Aristophanes’ case for the superiority of poetry to philosophy rests on his conviction that poetry supplies the poet, especially the comic poet, with rhetorical resources and defenses that the philosopher, especially the Socratic philosopher, lacks (see, e.g., *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 24–25, 44–49, 63–65, 192–93, 233–35, 311–12). It is possible then to read the *Gorgias* as a kind of Platonic response to Aristophanes’ critique, albeit one that quietly concedes that there was more than a little truth in charge of the “adversary.” A reading of sessions 12 and 13 of the 1963 course confirms that Strauss regarded the *Gorgias* as a reply to Aristophanes. And as far as one can discern from the barely legible notes in which Strauss sketched the beginnings of an outline for his planned essay on the *Gorgias*, the *Clouds* was to play a key role in the introductory section of that essay.

A detailed comparison of the 1957 course and the 1963 course is not possible here. Nevertheless, let me raise a few points that readers may consider further as they turn to

the transcripts. The most striking difference is in Strauss's mode of proceeding: In the 1963 course, Strauss has virtually every passage of the dialogue read aloud (by his reader, Donald Reinken), whereas in the 1957 course he often paraphrases portions of the text himself before commenting on them. One result of this difference is that Strauss does not make it to the end of the dialogue in the 1963 course and does not discuss, beyond a few general remarks, the myth at the end of the *Gorgias*. Still, the 1963 course sticks somewhat more closely to the text, and as the second of the two courses it should be regarded as the more authoritative source for Strauss's considered view of the dialogue. In this connection it will also be relevant to students and scholars that the tapes of that course survive (and are available on the Leo Strauss Center website) and that Strauss's seminar on Plato's *Protagoras* in the spring of 1965 devoted the first three meetings to a summary of his interpretation of the *Gorgias* from the course given in 1963.

As for differences between the content of the two courses, I will mention only two. First, whereas the 1963 course opens with an extensive discussion of the twin challenges to the possibility of political philosophy posed by positivism and historicism, the 1957 course begins with a broader consideration of Plato's understanding of the meaning of philosophy as such, a consideration that includes a striking comparison between Plato on the one hand, and Descartes and his heirs on the other, over the question of dogmatism and skepticism. If the 1963 course is perhaps superior as a reading of the *Gorgias*, the opening lecture of the 1957 course is of broader interest than its 1963 counterpart, since the earlier lecture takes up more fundamental questions. (A reading of the opening lecture of the 1957 course should be supplemented by a consideration of Strauss's discussion of Plato's doctrine of the ideas in session 12 of the 1957 course.) Second, when it comes to interpreting the dialogue itself, perhaps the most important difference between the two courses concerns Strauss's analysis of the character of Callicles. In both courses, Strauss repeatedly emphasizes that Callicles cannot be persuaded by Socrates; unlike Polus, with whom Socrates has at least some success, Callicles cannot be moved by Socrates' arguments or by his rhetoric. He is the representative in the dialogue of the man whom the philosopher cannot really budge. But why is he immovable? In the 1957 course Strauss initially stresses as the root of Callicles' obstinacy his softness and his desire for self-indulgence. Only subsequently and to a limited extent does he discuss two other features of his character or concerns that are more heavily stressed in the 1963 course: Callicles' enslavement to convention, which manifests itself especially in his attachment to a certain vision of manliness according to which a true man never leaves his post or abandons his position in argument, and his indignation at the suffering of the just and the prosperity of the wicked. These aspects of Callicles' complex make-up are more fully fleshed out in the 1963 course, especially Callicles' indignation, the discussion of which leads to a fascinating account of what Strauss calls "the dialectics of self-defense," whereby a legitimate concern for protection against injustice can lead one ultimately in the direction of tyrannical aggression.

Despite these differences, the two courses interpret the dialogue in fundamentally the same way. Strauss did not drastically change his view of the dialogue between the two courses or in the process of teaching the second of them. I can hardly do justice here to the richness and complexity of Strauss's interpretation of the *Gorgias* as a whole, but I

will indicate a few of its leading features. Unlike most scholars who have written on the dialogue, Strauss does not read the dialogue as an unmitigated condemnation of rhetoric. Crucial to his interpretation is the thought that rhetoric remains the central theme of the dialogue throughout its three main parts: the Gorgias section, the Polus section, and the Callicles section. According to Strauss, the harsh criticism of rhetoric in the first and especially the second section eventually gives way in the third to a more complicated verdict that, in important ways, restores the standing of rhetoric. The examination of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* proves to be in part an examination of its necessity, even or especially for the philosopher. And while Socrates may be genuinely critical of the sophistic rhetoric practiced and taught by Gorgias, he also points towards a new form of rhetoric that could bridge the gulf between philosophy and the city. Strauss's analysis of this new, noble rhetoric has many aspects, but let me highlight three points on which he places particular emphasis. First, the rhetoric that Socrates sketches in the *Gorgias* defends philosophy in an indirect way, by accusing the city or by "calling the *polis* before the bar of philosophy." Second, to be effective, such rhetoric must abstract from or remain silent about the peak of philosophy, as is indicated by the absence of the doctrine of the ideas from the dialogue. "The peak is missing," Strauss says repeatedly in the 1963 course. Third, since the silence about the peak of philosophy is also a silence about its pleasures, the new rhetoric asserts a radical divide between the pleasant and the good. Of course, these are only three points in Strauss's rich account of the kind of rhetoric to which the *Gorgias* points, a rhetoric which, as he also repeatedly stresses, is quite different in its aims and character from the erotic rhetoric of the *Phaedrus*. In stating these three points in list form, I have surely oversimplified Strauss's interpretation, and to correct that oversimplification one would need to elaborate each point, think about the connections between them, and bring in other many considerations that have not even been mentioned. No preface can adequately capture the intricacy of Strauss's reading of the *Gorgias*. Fortunately, readers can now see with their own eyes what Strauss actually said.

I would like to thank Mark Verbitsky and Ariel Helfer for their help in editing the 1957 and the 1963 courses.

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Session 2: October 3, 1973

[In progress] **Leo Strauss:**—our reading of the *Gorgias*, of the first part, the conversation between Socrates and Gorgias. I remind you of the most obvious things. Socrates, accompanied by Chaerephon, is eager to hear Gorgias but he is detained in the marketplace by Chaerephon. So he comes too late for Gorgias' display, the *epideixis* of his rhetorical power; and in addition, he is not interested in that display. He's eager to have a conversation, a *dialexis*, on the rhetoric with the master orator Gorgias. But Gorgias, on the other hand, who sees that there is a difference between a display and conversation, between *epideixis* and conversation, understands the conversation on rhetoric as itself¹ a kind of display. He wants to show his power of answering questions as well and quickly as possible. So the difference between rhetoric, between *epideixis* and conversation, is reduced to the difference between long speeches and brief speeches. And this is, of course, a trap into which poor Gorgias falls. And from this we learn in passing that the master rhetorician is not Gorgias but Socrates, because he can set up the trap and Gorgias falls into that. And from this we may draw a more general conclusion: this dialogue, while explicitly devoted to Gorgias' rhetorical art, exhibits in fact also and especially Socrates' rhetorical art. And since we have reason to believe that Socrates was a superior man, we will be more interested in the display of Socrates' rhetorical art than in that of Gorgias. I believe that is not too difficult to understand.

Now as for the difference between these two—this very provisional difference which is introduced in the first pages, between display and conversation—we have heard hardly more than that display consists in praising or blaming, but not in making clear what the thing is. This making clear what the thing is is the task of conversation—or, if we use the Greek term, then of dialectics. And we have noted last time that there is some connection, however dark, between this distinction between exhibition and conversation and the distinction between facts and value judgments which is so popular today.

Now the question arises: It is admitted that rhetoric is an art that is provisionally admitted—but there are many arts: What kind of art is rhetoric and with what subject does it have to do? The first answer is simple: with speeches, with speeches. But there are many arts. Doesn't every art have² [something] to do with speeches? I believe that needs a moment's reflection. If you are familiar with the art of milking cows, that is not an art of speaking: you don't talk to a cow. I mean, although a milkmaid might make all kinds of noises, but one can hardly say that she talks to the cow. So not necessarily all arts proceed through speeches. Gorgias admits that, in a way, and modifies or corrects his original definition and says, "Well, there are arts that proceed *chiefly* through speeches and arts that proceed *chiefly* through non-speeches"—like the milkmaid; her art is practically speechless. And in the case of the cobbler's apprentice, that would be a borderline case.

I believe that was more or less the point which we had reached. And where was that? That was in 450b2. Have you . . . this passage Mr. Blanton, 450b3?

Mr. Blanton: Socrates' speech? "Moreover, it is the same, Gorgias, with all the other arts"?

LS: Now, let me see. 450b3. Ya, well, anyway, there is a deadlock and it is suggested by Gorgias, "Well, maybe the people are tired of these many speeches they have heard, and I suppose also the many speeches they have made, and it is perhaps better to interrupt, to put an end to their speeches, to these speeches." Do you have this passage? What does Gorgias say?

Mr. Blanton: This is 450b?

LS: 458b.

Mr. Blanton: Did we get that far?

LS: No, you are quite right. You are quite right.

Mr. Blanton: I thought were back about 449c or d—something in there.

LS: Ya, ya, you're quite right. Which was the passage you meant?

Blanton: About 449c3, where Socrates says, "That is just what I want, Gorgias: give me a display of this very skill—in brevity of speech; your lengthy style will do another time."ⁱⁱ

LS: Ya. So in other words, that makes it certain that Gorgias is now compelled to go into the Socratic trap by giving short answers to questions which do not permit of a short answer. Yes?

Mr. Blanton: Before I go on, can everyone hear in the back, hear Mr. Strauss tolerably well? All right.

Gor.: "Well, I will do that, and you will admit that you never heard anyone speak more briefly."

Soc.: "Come then; since you claim to be skilled in rhetorical art, and to be able to make anyone else a rhetorician, tell me with what particular thing rhetoric is concerned: as for example, weaving is concerned with the manufacture of clothes, is it not?"

Gor.: "Yes."

Soc.: "And music, likewise, with the making of tunes?"

Gor.: "Yes."

Soc.: "Upon my word, Gorgias, I do admire your answers! You make them as brief as they well can be." (449b-d)

ⁱⁱ Blanton reads from the W. R. M. Lamb translation of the *Gorgias* from the Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1925); this translation will be reproduced here, even with its sometimes unorthodox punctuation.

LS: That is perfectly good, only the oath of Socrates is mistranslated. Socrates swears by Hera, the wife of Zeus, and that is not inappropriate because he had just mentioned the art of weaving, a feminine art. Now this oath “by Hera” occurs quite frequently in the mouth of Socrates, especially in Plato, and we might perhaps think for one moment why Socrates does this—because it was known as a woman’s oath, and Socrates presents himself as a sort of woman by using this woman’s oath. How would you account for that? After all, Socrates was not a particularly feminine man. Now what is the difference between a man and a woman? And I do not mean this as an introduction to a course on sexology. [Laughter] Well, men go in the fields—of course, in the highest case, the field of honor, but also in [the] fields to see how their workers are working. And the woman is doing the work at [the] house; so they stay at home. And what do they do when staying at the home, apart from cooking and taking care of other domestic routines? I believe that, as the present liberation movement shows (things have not so radically changed as one might wish or fear), that they are sitting together and talk[ing]. [They] don’t go out. And what³ [do men] like Socrates do? They also sit in corners and talk and don’t behave like men. So there is something feminine in what Socrates does. And that’s not the only funny oath which Socrates uses. There are others, but this is the first which occurs here. Yes?

Mr. Blanton: Gor.: “Yes, Socrates, I consider myself a very fair hand at that.” (449d)

LS: You see, Gorgias doesn’t suffer from false modesty. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “You are right there. Come now, answer me in the same way about rhetoric: with what particular thing is its skill concerned?”

Gor.: “With speech.” (449d)

LS: With *speeches*.

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “What kind of speeches, Gorgias? Do you mean that which shows by what regimen sick people could get well?”

Gor.: “No.”

Soc.: “Then rhetoric is not concerned with all kinds of speech (speeches).”

Gor.: “No, I say.”

Soc.: “Yet it does make men able to speak.

Gor.: “Yes.”

Soc.: “And to understand also the things about which they speak.

Gor.: “Of course.”

Soc.: “Now, does the medical art, which we mentioned just now, make men able to understand and speak about the sick.”

Gor.: “It must.”

Soc.: “Hence the medical art also, it seems, is concerned with speech (speeches).”

Gor.: “Yes.”

Soc.: "That is, speech(es) about diseases."

Gor.: "Certainly."

Soc.: "Now, is gymnastic also concerned with speech(es) about the good and bad condition of our bodies?"

Gor.: "Quite so."

Soc.: "And moreover it is the same, Gorgias, with all the other arts; each of them is concerned with that kind of speech which deals with the subject matter of that particular art."

Gor.: "Apparently."

Soc.: "Then why, pray, do you not give the name 'rhetorical' to those other arts, when they are concerned with speech(es), if you call that 'rhetoric' which has to do with speech?" (449e-450b)

LS: So in other words, all *technai*, all arts, deal with speeches. Therefore, the specific difference of rhetoric cannot be found in the fact that it makes men speakers. And that's the first difficulty. How does Gorgias get out of that fix?

Mr. Blanton:

Gor.: "Because, Socrates, the skill in those other arts is almost wholly concerned with manual work and similar activities, whereas in rhetoric, there is no such manual working, but its whole activity and efficacy is by means of speech." (450b-c)

LS: Is *through* speeches, *through* speeches, yeah? Not the handling of speeches. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Gor.: "For this reason I claim for the rhetorical art that it is concerned with speech, and it is a correct description, I maintain."

Soc.: "Now, do I understand what sort of art you choose to call it?"

Perhaps, however, I shall get to know this more clearly. But answer me this: we have arts, have we not?"

Gor.: "Yes." (450c)

LS: Ya, that is it. Why does he put this question? Is it not elementary that we have arts? Why does he bring this into the form of a question? Well, he wishes to make sure that they have a common ground: that is, the undeniable fact that there are arts is the starting-point for the question of what is an art.

Student: Is it important that he uses the plural here?

LS: I beg your pardon?

Student: Is it important that Socrates uses the plural in his question? He says *technai*, rather than *technē*.

LS: Ya, because that creates a difficulty, doesn't it? That we have a variety of arts, and therefore the question arises: What is the common characteristic of all these so very different arts. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: "Then amongst the various arts some, I take it, consist mainly of work and so require but brief speech; while others require none, for the art's object may be achieved actually in silence, as with painting, sculpture, and many other arts. It is to such as these that I understand you to refer when you say rhetoric has no concern with them; is not that so?"

Gor.: "Your supposition is quite correct, Socrates."

Soc.: "But there is another class of arts which achieve their whole purpose through speech and—to put it roughly—require either no action to aid them, or very little; for example, numeration, calculation, geometry, draught-playing, and many other arts: some of these have the speech in about equal proportion to the action, but most have it as the larger part, or absolutely the whole of their operation and effect is by means of speech(es). It is one of this class of arts that I think you refer to as rhetoric."

Gor.: "You are right." (450c-e)

LS: So we have now bipartition of the whole sphere of arts into such arts as do their work silently, without speech, and those which do their whole work through speeches, and then the many borderline cases. And therefore Gorgias says, "Well, rhetoric is the art which deals with the arts that achieve their goal chiefly or exclusively through speeches." And there he seems to have gotten out of the trouble by this qualification. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: "But, mind you, I do not think that it is any one of these that you mean to call rhetoric; though, so far as your expression went, you did say that the art which has its effect through speech is rhetoric, and one might retort, if one cared to strain at mere words: So, Gorgias, you call numeration rhetoric! But I do not believe it is either numeration or geometry that you call rhetoric."

Gor.: "Your belief is correct, Socrates, and your retort just." (450e-451a)

LS: You see the rhetorical character of Gorgias' answer by the twofold-ness of his answer: "You make a correct assumption and a just assumption by assuming that I would never regard arithmetic as rhetoric or a part of rhetoric, although it is not a silent art." Yes?

Student: Earlier when Chaerephon was speaking, he shifted from *dikaiōs* to *orthōs*, when he was saying "Would we call you justly?" and then it was "Would we call you correctly?"

LS: Ya, frequently the words “justly” and “correctly” are used synonymously, but according to the original meaning, they’re different. For example, if a carpenter drives a nail into wood, one wouldn’t say he acts justly; but he acts correctly. And yet there are other cases when you can use the two terms synonymously.

Same student: I mean, is there any suggestion that the one points more in the direction of practical arts and the other more in the direction of theoretical? Or is that straining it?

LS: Ya, there is a slightly stronger emphasis on justice when they speak of “justly” than when they speak of “correctly.” But that thought is not visible and, still less, it is not important in all cases. But there is a certain kinship between the two things. If someone acts justly, one can frequently say he acts correctly, and vice versa. That’s not true in all cases. For example, the planners in Watergateⁱⁱⁱ may have acted very correctly in what they did, but that does not prove yet that they acted justly. That is not an un-Platonic example, if you remember the First Book of the *Republic*, where it is proven that the most competent guard [or] keeper is the most competent thief, because they must—or say, replace the guard by the detective, then you [can] see perfectly what Plato had in mind.^{iv} We [will] come back to that question later on. Shall we go on?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “Come now, and do your part in finishing off the answer to my question. Since rhetoric is in fact one of these arts which depend mainly on speech, and there are likewise other arts of the same nature, try if you can tell me with what this rhetoric, which has its effect in speech, is concerned. For instance, suppose someone asks me about one or other of the arts which I was mentioning just now: Socrates, what is the art of numeration? I should tell him, as you did me a moment ago, that it is one of those which have their effect through speech. And suppose he went on to ask: With what is its speech concerned? I should say: With the odd and even numbers, whatever may chance to be the amount of each. And if he asked again: What art is it that you call calculation? I should say that this also is one of those which achieve their whole effect by speech. And if he proceeded to ask: With what is it concerned? I should say—in the manner of those who draft amendments in the Assembly—that ‘in all else’ calculation ‘corresponds’ with numeration, for both are concerned with the same thing, the odd and the even; but that they differ to this extent, that calculation considers the numerical values of odd and even numbers not merely in themselves but in relation to each other.” (451a-c).

ⁱⁱⁱ LS refers to the break-in of the Democratic National Headquarters in the Watergate complex in Washington, D. C. on June 17, 1972. Aides to President Richard Nixon were implicated in the burglary, and the ensuing scandal led to the resignation of the President in August 1974.

^{iv} See *Republic* 333e-334b.

LS: Ya, well, what he translates [as] “calculation”—in Greek, *logistikē*—is what we understand by arithmetic. The Greeks had a different notion. They understood by arithmetic the knowledge of numbers as numbers and not the operations with them. And so, for example,⁴ if you hear the number 4,912, that you know the next number will be 4,913, that belongs to arithmetic: the knowledge of the numbers as numbers. And that you know that every odd number is succeeded by an even number and vice versa.⁵ [But] the operations, of which we think addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, this is *logistikē*. The clearest presentation of this whole problem you will find in Mr. Klein’s book on Greek logistics, which is available in English translation.^v Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “And suppose, on my saying that astronomy also achieves its whole effect by speech, he were to ask me: And the speech of astronomy, with what is it concerned? I should say: With the courses of the stars and sun and moon and their relative speeds.”

Gor.: “And you would be right, Socrates.” (451c)

LS: You see, of course, that Socrates, while making clear his question to Gorgias, educates Gorgias. Yeah? I mean, he teaches him how to speak properly and clearly. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “Come then and do your part, Gorgias: rhetoric is one of those arts, is it not, which carry out their work and achieve their effect by speech?”

Gor.: “That is so.”

Soc.: “Then tell me what they deal with: what subject is it, of all in the world, that is dealt with by this speech employed by rhetoric?”

Gor.: “The greatest of human affairs, Socrates, and the best.” (451d)

LS: Ya. Now, again a deplorable relapse into praising and blaming, instead of giving an answer to the question of “What is?” And how does Socrates respond?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “But that also, Gorgias, is ambiguous, and still by no means clear. I expect you have heard people singing over their cups the old catch, in which the singers enumerate the best things in life,—first health, then beauty, and thirdly, as the author of the catch puts it, wealth got without guile.

Gorgias: “Yes, I have heard it; but what is the point of your quotation?” (451d-e)

LS: Ya, so here he quotes a famous drinking song, which seems to indicate the highest subjects or objects of human desires. And one just happens to know this song from other sources, and there is a slight difference that is noticeable here. And what is this

^v Jacob Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968; Dover Reprint, 1992).

difference? Gorgias tacitly retracts all things of which he has spoken before. And in the poem it was said that being healthy is best for human beings. It is not a praise of the gods to say that they don't suffer from disease; that goes without saying. It would be surely a very strange praise of a god, that he is healthy. So Gorgias omits that. And you see also what Socrates does here. He introduces another—he changes the audience. He introduces a fictitious dialogue into the actual dialogue. And that amounts in effect to an enlargement of the audience. All these people who have ever heard that drinking song are now present and, in a way, participants in the conversation, ya? This is a way in which Socrates teaches, in this particular case, Gorgias, by enlarging and reminding him of things of which he has not thought.

Student: If Gorgias has heard the song, Gorgias knows the fourth good, which Socrates omits, which is to be with friends.

LS: You mean the wealth, the mention of wealth, or what?

Same student: No, there's also the fourth in the song given at the bottom of the page. Socrates omits that, but Gorgias must know it, if he's heard the song. Well—

LS: I do not know, where does he speak of it?

Student: She's referring to—in the Loeb translation, at the bottom, the song is given.

LS: Oh, I see. Where? On page It is not in Plato. Yes, that he omits—Socrates [does].

Student: Why?

LS: What's your suggestion?

Mr. Denks: It is not the product of any *technē*?

Mr. Blanton: The suggestion—did you [hear it]?—Mr. Denks suggested that the fourth is not a product of an art.

LS: Ya, but here that is not necessarily to assume, I believe. But the gods live in eternal youth, don't they?

Student: They, yes, well at the—

LS: And therefore it is not the special ground of praise of the gods to say that they live in eternal youth with their friends. At any rate, Socrates—whatever his reasons may have been—he doesn't give any reason why he omits it. But what is important, however, is that he excludes explicitly unjust wealth. Unjust wealth is not a source of happiness, of blessedness. Is this not clear? Because that will come in later on when the question of the

relation of rhetoric and justice will come up. And we find that Gorgias is not particularly concerned with exercising his art with the greatest possible justice. Is this clear?

Students: Yes.

LS: . . . Take your text. Ya, and so Gorgias knows this fact, that health and so on are praised, and has heard this often. But “What is the relevance of that?” he asks, and what does Socrates say at the beginning of 452?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “I mean that, supposing the producers of those blessings which the author of the catch commends—namely, the doctor, the trainer, and the money-getter—were to stand before you this moment, and the doctor first should say: ‘Gorgias is deceiving you, Socrates; for it is not his art, but mine, that deals with man’s greatest good.’ Then supposing I were to ask him: ‘And who are you, to say so?’ He would probably reply, ‘A doctor.’ ‘Well what do you mean that the work of your art is the greatest good?’ ‘What else, Socrates,’ I expect he would reply, ‘is health? What greater good is there for men than health.’” (452a-b)

LS: Ya, “for men,” for human beings. The gods are excluded. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “And supposing the trainer came next and said: ‘I also should be surprised, indeed, Socrates, if Gorgias could show you a greater good in his art than I can in mine.’ Again I should say to him in his turn: ‘And who are you, sir? What is your work?’ ‘A trainer,’ he would reply.” (452b)

LS: Ya, but “sir” is a misleading translation. If I were a perfectly free man, I would say “Mack.” [Laughter] Namely, the word is *anthrōpe*, which is a Greek word for “human being” and is used in a derogatory sense in such contexts. Otherwise, when you speak to someone who is at all respectable, you say “man,” *anēr*. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “‘A trainer,’ he would reply, ‘and my work is making men’s bodies beautiful and strong.’ After the trainer would come the money-getter, saying—with, I fancy, a fine contempt for everyone: ‘Pray consider, Socrates, if you can find a good that is greater than wealth, either on Gorgias’ showing or on that of anyone else at all.’ ‘Why then,’ we should say to him, ‘are you a producer of that?’ ‘Yes,’ he would say. ‘And who are you?’ ‘A money-getter.’ ‘Well then,’ we shall say to him, ‘do you judge wealth to be the greatest good for men?’ ‘Of course,’ he will reply. ‘But look here,’ we should say; ‘our friend Gorgias contends that his own art is a cause

of greater good than yours.’ Then doubtless his next question would be: ‘And what is that good? Let Gorgias answer.’ Now come, Gorgias; imagine yourself being questioned by those persons and by me, and tell us what is this thing that you say is the greatest good for men, and that you claim to produce.” (452b-c)

LS: Ya. Now Socrates enlarges the audience still more. He brings in all possible competitors of Gorgias, and so Gorgias must give an answer to defend his position as a man of the first rank. And he has the nerve to say, “the money-maker is at the top of the world”—an answer which is, I believe, still intelligible. And we must see how Socrates can get out of the fix which he has prepared for himself, it seems. What, Mr. Welch, you are not satisfied?

Mr. Welch: Well, no, I was, I guess, waiting for you to comment—but I’m sure you’re going to do it—these have not been short speeches of Socrates.

LS: Ya, well, no, that is necessary to say that. And it proves, if any proof were needed, the fact that Socrates used what is popularly called irony. So when he says you must give only brief answers, he doesn’t wish this to be taken too literally. And if someone would say, “This is a long answer,” then he would say, “All right, I will be perfectly satisfied with a brief answer if you show me how I can answer it briefly. And therefore let us be satisfied for the time being with a long answer.” But there is another difficulty to which Socrates draws our attention here, namely—yes?

Student: Before we go on, Mr. Welch, those two long speeches you are referring to are not of the same kind as the other speeches, because they are also drama. As Mr. Strauss pointed out, they involve imaginary conversations. So in a sense, they are both long speeches and not long speeches at the same time.

LS: But this, I believe, should not detain us too long because, how ever little experienced we may be in questioning and answering, we all must have observed that there are questions which are compatible with brief answers, and then there are questions which require an extensive discussion, long speeches. And what Socrates does here, by these fictitious dialogues within dialogues, is that he enlarges the audience and therewith he enlarges the whole discussion of this. Now we are confronted not only with Gorgias and his admirable art but with all his competitors. And what competitors! Not merely physicians and gymnastic trainers, but even the greatest moneymakers. And how can Gorgias, who earned a lot of money with his rhetorical art, compete with these people? Now how does he get out of that difficulty?

Mr. Blanton:

Gor.: “A thing, Socrates, which in truth is the greatest good, and a cause not merely of freedom to mankind at large, but also of dominion to single persons in their several cities.” (452d)

LS: Ya, “in his own city.” So, in other words, the justification of moneymaking is not the amount of money, but the best thing you can get for them. And the best thing you can get for them is freedom, because if you are a slave you may be able to get your emancipation through the money you have; and if you are a freeman, you can by all kinds of contributions by your well-wishers be elected, and become the ruler of the city. But in the second case, he makes an interesting qualification: “in your own city.” So Gorgias cannot compete with Socrates in this respect. Gorgias doesn’t have a ghost of a chance of becoming a ruler in Athens, because he’s not an Athenian citizen. But here the difficulty arises: Why is rhetoric so highly to be esteemed: because it supplies us with money or because it supplies us with freedom and power? After all, these are two different ends. And surely the other implication which we easily overlook: The greatest good, according to Gorgias, is not rhetoric, but what you can get through rhetoric—freedom and rule, freedom and empire. And now Gorgias must defend what he is—

Student: Mr. Strauss, I mean, if one talks about freedom and empire or rule, one would think that what he really means is the art of politics—*politikē*, rather than [rhetoric].

LS: Ya, but what is the art of politics?

Same student: Well, clearly he thinks, or he seems to suggest that it’s the art of, I suppose, speaking in such a way as to control large numbers of men.

LS: Ya, but if you have no right to talk in the assembly, what can you do? So you must be a citizen, otherwise you commit a grave crime and misdemeanor if you go into the assembly and try to speak there without having the legal right to do so. So we are confronted with the question: What is the highest good? If rhetoric is only a means of getting it, rhetoric cannot be the highest good. As for the two subjects, freedom and rule or empire, that formula occurs before Plato, in Thucydides, I think, in Diodotus’ speech in the Third Book of Thucydides.^{vi} Diodotus speaks of freedom and empire as the objects of men to⁶ [which] we look up, and both for oneself as a member of the citizen body and also for the city itself, of course, that one is a member of an imperial or hegemonic city. Socrates is still waiting for a better explanation of what Gorgias has in mind.

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “Well, and what do you call it?”

Gor.: “I call it the ability to persuade with speeches either judges in the law courts or statesmen in the council-chamber or the commons in the Assembly or an audience at any other meeting that may be held on public affairs. And I tell you that by virtue of this power you will have the doctor as your slave, and the trainer as your slave; your money-getter will turn out to be making money not for himself, but for another,—in fact for you, who are able to speak and persuade the multitude.”

Soc.: “I think now, Gorgias, you have come very near to showing us the art of rhetoric as you conceive it, and if I at all take your meaning,

^{vi} Thucydides 3.45.

you say that rhetoric is a producer of persuasion and has therein its whole business and main consummation. Or can you tell us of any other function it can have beyond that of affecting persuasion in the minds of an audience?"

Gor.: "None at all, Socrates; your definition seems to me satisfactory. That is the main substance of the art."

LS: So, ya, we know now what rhetoric is: the art of producing persuasion and therewith of subjecting the people persuaded to one's rule. They do what you tell them to do, if you present that art and approach them in the proper manner. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: "Then listen, Gorgias: I, let me assure you, for so I persuade myself—if ever there was a man who debated with another from a desire of knowing the truth of the subject discussed, I am such a man; and so, I trust, are you."

Gor.: "Well, what then, Socrates?"

Soc.: "I will now tell you. What the real nature of the persuasion is that you speak of as resulting from rhetoric, and what the matters are with which persuasion deals, I assure you that I do not clearly understand; though I may have my suspicions as to what I suppose you to mean by it, and with what things you think it deals. But nevertheless I will ask you what you do mean by the persuasion that results from rhetoric, and with what matters you think it deals. Now why is it that, having a suspicion of my own, I'm going to ask you this, instead of stating it myself? It is not on your account, but with a view to the argument, and to such a progress in it as may best reveal to us—"

[break in the tape]

LS: —made the distinction between two kinds of persuasion—

[break in the tape]

—We have heard that rhetoric is the art of producing persuasion. And now Socrates has introduced a fundamental distinction between two kinds of persuasion. One is just belief, and the other is teaching. And the one which is obviously more valuable is teaching, because it gives solid conviction and not merely a sham conviction like the other form of persuasion. Does this make sense? Very much depends on it. The history of centuries, not to say millennia, turns around this question, the question of knowledge and belief. And Socrates plays a very great role in this controversy, which goes on up to the present day although the terms have changed in various ways. Yes?

Student: One is tempted to say that it makes more sense than almost anything else. I'm rather struck by, even in some discussions with students, our own students of one sect or

another, they will frequently talk about the merits of a doctrine in terms of its effects on themselves, simply ignoring whether it is true or not.

LS: Yes,⁷ this is an important distinction, but we must not forget it could be that the sphere in which we have genuine solid knowledge refers only to things of the second or third order. And when we come up to the true questions which decide about our fate in this life or in another one, then we are confronted or we no longer have the possibility of learning, of proving, but must in one way or the other believe. And what do we do in that case? What did Socrates do in such cases?

Same student: Well, there are less and better founded beliefs.

LS: Still, even a better-founded belief is still a belief. I don't believe that Socrates would be satisfied with that. There is another thing which has very much to do with this question and that was called in Roman times suspense of judgment. But the question is: Can you suspend your judgment regarding the most important things, and throughout your whole life? And must you not therefore take a leap, as someone called it? Is this not more reasonable than to suspend judgment? All these things are implied here, but they do not come into the open, except in a much later stage of the argument. But at any rate, at first glance the distinction between persuasion, mere persuasion, and teaching makes sense. And from this, or rather within this dimension, teaching has a higher rank than mere persuasion. This, I believe, we can grant. But the question is: How far will this lead us? Yes?

Mr. Blanton: Before we go on, could I ask a question about—?

LS: Sure.

Mr. Blanton: In 453b, where Socrates⁸ says, "Listen Gorgias, I, let me assure you, for so I persuade myself—if ever there was a man who debated with another from a desire of knowing the truth . . ., I am such a man." He has to say, "I persuade myself I am such a man"—that he wants to know the truth. That means, that implies to me, that he doesn't really know that he is such a man that wants to know the truth. He persuades himself that he is such a man. Am I understanding that correctly?

LS: No, no, no. "Know well," he says to Gorgias, "know clearly that I do not know, but I suspect that you say and mean these and these things, and—"

[break in the tape]

—telling him what precisely he means.

Mr. Blanton: Are we talking about the same passage? 453? Maybe we are, and I'm not understanding.

LS: What page?

Mr. Blanton: 453b? Where Socrates says to Gorgias, that he—Socrates, says of himself, “I am a man that wants to know things; I debate with you because I desire to know.” But he prefaces that statement by saying, “or so I persuade myself.”

LS: He may be mistaken about what he truly believes and what he does not truly believe. Can this not happen?

Mr. Blanton: Sure. Then I have a further question. The emphasis in several places in the passages we just read stressed the orderly completion of the argument, as opposed to just snatching at an answer. And I’m not sure what that means—I mean, that they’re going somewhere that neither of them know the end. That’s why they—

LS: That could be an implication. But the main point: Is it not true if you have a discussion, you really would like to know what has been established and what has been made clear and what not? Is this not necessary to know?

Mr. Blanton: Well, I was just wondering⁹ if this didn’t make it clear to us that Socrates really was searching after something—that he wasn’t just being a rhetorician himself, or persuading Gorgias of something that he didn’t see, but he, Socrates, didn’t know the answer either. Or is that too much to assume?

LS: No, hitherto Socrates has not given us an answer to the question of what rhetoric is. He has only granted that it is the art of producing persuasion, but that there are two kinds of persuasion—let us say, the persuasion which teaches and the persuasion which merely persuades. And the persuasion which teaches has taken in itself a higher status than that which merely persuades. Mr. Cohen?

Mr. Cohen: Yeah, it’s about the superior status of the teaching over the belief, or over the persuasion to believe, that I would like people to talk about a little more. The argument seems to be that if you are persuaded to believe something, you have a less solid conviction than if you are persuaded through teaching. In the first place, I’m not sure whether that’s true. I suspect that there are people who believe something very strongly even though what they believe may not be a matter of knowledge, and that belief is sometimes described as unshakeable. And in the second case, there’s what seems to me a possible argument about the superiority of knowledge to belief, because belief can be true or false, whereas knowledge can’t be true or false.

LS: Ya, right.

Mr. Cohen: But it seems to me that that argument itself kind of presupposes that the belief is subject to being known to be true or false. That is, if one can have a belief characterized as false, then there is knowledge about that subject which he believes in. But it may be that the very subject of his belief is a subject about which knowledge is unavailable. So then you wouldn’t want to characterize it as either true or false belief.

LS: Well, then he doesn't know.

Mr. Cohen: Excuse me?

LS: Then he, strictly speaking, cannot be said to believe. But¹⁰ he is in an intermediate position between belief and unbelief. And if he is wise, he will suspend judgment.

Mr. Cohen: Why, strictly speaking, couldn't he be said to believe in something that it's not certain whether his believing can be false? Why can't you believe in something in which you may be unsure or in which there may be no knowledge?

LS: Ya, but what is the status of these things, of these convictions, or however you may call them?

Mr. Cohen: I suppose that that's what they are: a conviction.

LS: Pardon?

Mr. Cohen: I said, I'm not sure what we are to say other than that it is a conviction or a belief.

LS: Right there, let's call it an "opinion" to use a perfectly, a seemingly, innocent word. We all have opinions about all kinds of things of which we know nothing. And what a man like Socrates does is that he tries to examine his opinions and not to accept such opinions. The question is where it will lead to: Will it lead to complete emptiness, so to speak, or will it lead to something solid? For example, he would probably assume that he is an Athenian and that Athens is located there and there, and the many other things that he knows or has heard about Athens, as all other Athenians did. What is the value of this knowledge?

Mr. Cohen: If I understood your question, the knowledge that you were speaking of can be used for the purpose of giving him some assurance about who he is. But my main question concerned the assertion that knowledge was superior to belief. And it doesn't seem to me that there's been any very good argument made for that.

LS: No, that is, I think, if one can say anything about Socrates, one can say that is what he thought—and that is what he meant when he said that virtue is knowledge; and where we do not have knowledge, our virtue cannot be genuine. It may be admirable from many points of view, but it cannot be genuine. There—I believe, that one can assume, in reading or studying Socrates.

Mr. Cohen: Well, that seems to be saying also that virtue is more important than certain values of belief. That is, if you can't be truly virtuous without having knowledge, and you might claim, "Well, I don't have knowledge about certain things that might make me truly virtuous, but I do have strong beliefs about those things—"

LS: Ya, but unfortunately the strength of belief does not guarantee for the soundness of that belief. I mean, if you think of what people, different people, have believed in different times, individuals or whole societies, then you cannot try to settle these questions by majority votes or anything of this kind. You have to go on. And that is what Socrates decided to do. As he put it somewhere in his *Apology*:^{vii} To make speeches, to spend the whole day making speeches about virtue, that is his happiness. The unexamined life is an impossible life, and he examines everything he believes. Certain things are not in the foreground. I mean, whether he believes that Zeus was the husband and brother of Hera and this whole brood, breed, which they generated, that is a question which needs a long discussion. But that was, I believe, not so terribly important for Socrates—but that is a strictly private opinion which needs examination too. Yes?

Student: I'm not sure that I understand Mr. Cohen's argument. But I'd just like to ask, I mean, even if there should be certain things about which we can do no better than have beliefs, isn't it always better, I mean, wouldn't it be better, for those things to have knowledge rather than beliefs? So that it would always be better to have knowledge rather than belief, even if it might not be possible in some particular cases. So that knowledge is always superior to belief.

LS: Well, could one not also say—I do not know whether this answer, as a suggestion, has any bearing on Mr. Cohen's question—that from a theological point of view, we would always say that God knows these most important things and not that He believes these things. So that even from this point of view, knowledge would be preferable.

Mr. Cohen: Yeah, let me just say, I would agree that knowledge would be preferable, if one could attain it. But the argument seems to be not so much whether it was preferable—at least I didn't understand the superior position of knowledge to be whether it was preferable—but rather the value of it, as opposed to the value of belief, regarding the strength of one's conviction. That is, that it was knowledge only that could give the possessor of it any—

LS: Ya, well, once it is granted that knowledge is superior to knowledge-less belief, then¹¹ in order to make things palatable, we can say of course [that] convictions which are supported by reasons of some strength are preferable to convictions which are not supported by such convictions, and so on. That is a relative thing. But that would be a deviation of the straight path which we have been trying to follow and of which Socrates reminded us from time to time. Mr. . . .

Student: Might it not be the case, though, that there are some things that can't be known, not because of any limitation in us, but because they are the kinds of things they are? That is, that some things—I believe Socrates argues this in certain places—are not knowable. They are by nature objects of opinion, [such] that the uncertainty that we have about them merely reflects that essential . . . And then could one possibly speculate that the things that are most important for us to be aware of are not the things that can be

^{vii} 38a.

known, but the things that are known to be I know that is not Socrates' position, but I can imagine a position myself—

LS: So that, in other words, the whole quest for knowledge is a wild goose chase? Could be.

Same student: I think that position has been taken—

LS: Ya, ya.

Same student: —and argued extensively. Let us say, for example, that we can know mathematical things, but we can't know what is just or unjust, because of the nature of the thing. That's not the Socratic position, I realize.

LS: Ya, then the question is, of course, whether you can draw such a simple line between just and unjust on the one hand, and the other subjects, on the other hand. In other words, whether Kant's position—if I may introduce his strange claim—has any solid foundation. I suggest that we continue, in order to finish at least the section which we began; that was in 454e3. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: "Then would you have us assume two forms of persuasion—one providing." (454e)

LS: Ya, "two forms." The word in Greek is *eidē*, a word which occurs relatively rarely in the *Gorgias*: two *kinds* of persuasion. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: "one providing belief without knowledge, and the other sure knowledge?"

Gor.: "Certainly."

Soc.: "Now which kind of persuasion is it that rhetoric creates in law courts or any public meeting on matters of right and wrong? The kind from which we get belief without knowledge, or that from which we get knowledge?"

Gor.: "Obviously, I presume, Socrates, that from which we get belief."

Soc.: "Thus rhetoric, it seems, is a producer of persuasion for belief, not for instruction in the matter of right and wrong."

Gor.: "Yes."

Soc.: "And so the rhetorician's business is not to instruct a law court or a public meeting in matters of right and wrong, but only to make them believe; since, I take it, he could not in a short while instruct such a mass of people in matters so important."

Gor.: "No, to be sure." (454e-455a)

LS: Ya, so that makes it, I think, perfectly clear where Socrates stands in this matter. He is looking for knowledge, solid knowledge, of the just and unjust things. There may be things other than just and unjust, like some measurements of the heavenly motions, but they are not so vital as questions of . . . Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Soc.: “Come, then, let us see what actually is our account of rhetoric: for I confess I am not yet able to distinguish what my own account of it is. When the city holds a meeting to appoint doctors or shipbuilders or any other set of craftsmen, there is no question then, is there, of the rhetorician giving advice? And clearly this is because in each appointment we have to elect the most skillful person. Again, in a case of building walls or constructing harbours or arsenals, our only advisors are the master-builders; or in consulting on the appointment of generals, or on a maneuver against the enemy, or on a military occupation, it is the general’s staff who will then advise us, and not the rhetoricians. Or what do you say, Gorgias, to these instances? For as you claim to be an orator yourself and to make orators of others, it is proper to inquire of you concerning your own craft. And here you must regard me as furthering your own interest: for it is quite likely that someone within these walls has a wish to become your pupil—indeed I fancy I perceive more than one, yes, a number of them, who, perhaps, would be ashamed to press you with questions. So, when you are being pressed with mine, consider that you are being questioned by them as well: ‘What shall we get, Gorgias, by coming to hear you? On what matters shall we be enabled to give advice to the state? Will it be only on right and wrong, or on those things besides which Socrates was mentioning just now?’ So try to give them an answer. (455a-d)

LS: So, in other words, he tries again to influence Gorgias by appealing to Gorgias’ self-interest. It is not sufficient that Gorgias says that he can teach people to speak; he must claim to teach people to speak about matters of the utmost importance for the *polis*. And here we are. We have been already at this point before, but we have come back to it, and now with a new difficulty, a difficulty caused by the distinction between persuasive speech in general and teaching speech in particular. Yes?

Student: . . . Socrates, aside from somehow poking at Gorgias’ self-interest—that, in a way, when he says here “Here you must regard me as furthering your own interest”—I wonder if, again, Socrates simply isn’t in some ways being ironic. I mean, it seems to me, actually what he is doing is furthering, in a certain way, what he sees as his own self-interest as instruction—

LS: But he appeals here to Gorgias’ self-interest, doesn’t he? I mean, these young people, mostly younger people, are impressed by the prestige of Gorgias and other people and

don't dare to speak up, and Socrates makes himself their spokesman and says, "Look Gorgias, you'll ruin your business if you do not speak, if you don't answer my question." He definitely appeals to Gorgias' self-interest and, I must say, there is nothing necessarily wicked in that, except if you start from the premise that teaching for money is something ignoble, as Athenian gentleman indeed were inclined to believe. But what will become of us poor professors if this belief would be resurrected? Yes?

Student: Doesn't Socrates, nevertheless, while he professes to further Gorgias' self-interest, isn't he at the same time really causing the very difficulty from which he has to extricate Gorgias? He is the one, through these questions, who has put Gorgias in this very peculiar and rather cramped position in front of all these potential pupils.

LS: Ya, but Socrates is not going around in Athens¹² [saying], "I can answer every question."

Same student: Oh, yeah, right, right.

LS: It does make a difference.

Same student: So in effect, then, Socrates is simply pulling out something which Gorgias had that no one—

LS: Ya, but—that is, always if someone raises a claim, he sits in a glass house and everyone can come and throw his stones at that glass house. Socrates does not sit in such a glass house. And some people have found that this was very unfair of Socrates, but other people found that it was very sensible of Socrates. [Laughter] Now let's go on, because we [will] come soon to a point where we can stop.

Mr. Blanton:

Gor.: "Well, I will try, Socrates, to reveal to you clearly the whole power of rhetoric: and in fact you have correctly shown the way to it yourself. You know, I suppose—" (455d)

LS: Ya, [a] literal translation would be "you have *beautifully* (or nobly) shown."^{viii} Gorgias, in contradistinction to Socrates, is not stingy or thrifty in his praise of Socrates' rhetoric, whereas Socrates doesn't praise Gorgias at all. You see, Socrates' irony is not wicked; he is not wicked. He doesn't praise Gorgias if Gorgias doesn't deserve praise. Yes?

Mr. Blanton:

Gor.: "You know, I suppose, that these great arsenals and walls of Athens, and the construction of your harbors, are due to the advice of Themistocles, and in part to that of Pericles, not to your craftsman."

^{viii} *kalōs*.

Soc.: “So we are told, Gorgias, of Themistocles; and as to Pericles, I heard him myself when he was advising us about the middle wall.” (455d-e).

LS: Ya, there is a long discussion about the so-called dramatic date of the *Gorgias*: When did this conversation take place? It obviously must have taken place after Themistocles; and there is evidence that it must have taken place after the death of Pericles; and Gorgias was only once in Athens. There is a long discussion of that. I believe that that is really of no interest whatever. Not that Plato was not precise, but since an orator, as defined here, is a ruler, especially in a democracy; and since there must always be orators, rulers, in democracies, it does not make any difference in which particular year this took place. In the whole period since democracy was established there was a preponderance of the orators. And Socrates makes here the little distinction, which is not unimportant for the question which Mr. Cohen and I had a short while before, when Socrates says, “Ya, that is said about Themistocles; and as for Pericles, I myself have heard him.”^{ix} There’s a great difference whether we know something through hearsay, as Socrates knew about Themistocles, and if you know it through your own senses, sight or hearing, as is in the case of Pericles. This is a very innocent distinction— you can say, a trivial distinction— between what you know through yourself and what you know through hearsay, but it has infinite implications once you begin to think: Why do you prefer what you have seen with your own eyes or heard with your own ears¹³ [to] what you know only in an indirect way through what other people told you? Do you understand me, Mr. Cohen? Good. Now?

Mr. Blanton:

Gor.: “So whenever there is an election of such persons as you were referring to, Socrates, you see it is the orators who give the advice and get resolutions carried in these matters.”

Soc.: “That is just what surprises me, Gorgias, and has made me ask you all this time what in the world the power of rhetoric can be. For, viewed in this light, its greatness comes over me as something supernatural.” (456a)

LS: Ya, something “demonic”^x—the adjective which Socrates applied to the voice of whatever it was which he had in himself—something superhuman, the power of rhetoric. And now, in the immediate sequel, Gorgias will prove empirically again, if anyone doubts, this demonic power of rhetoric. He, a non-physician, is called to a sick bed of a patient of his brother, a physician. And the brother is trying to persuade this poor dying man to take a medicine, and the doctor doesn’t have the slightest success. But then Gorgias comes in—he, with his power of rhetoric—and then the poor patient takes the medicine or accepts the injection, and lives happily ever after. [Laughter] And that is a sign of [the power of rhetoric]. And that happens, of course, not only in the intercourse between patients and their doctors, but also in the intercourse between citizens and their demagogues.

^{ix} LS clearly paraphrases here.

^x *daimonia*.

And now one word about the difficulty to which we come now and which is first discussed: The rhetoricians have a terrific power, as they have shown by many examples, one of them the judicial murder of Socrates. So they are suspect, and their great power is accompanied by great suspicion. What can they do? Socrates forces Gorgias to admit that he, Gorgias, does not have knowledge of right and wrong—not more than anyone else—and yet he has the nerve to say that he does not corrupt the young by his rhetorical teaching. Something must be done about it. Now Gorgias has a simple way out. He says, of course, “Ya, just as a boxing teacher is not necessarily responsible for the misuse of boxing by his pupils, as little is a teacher of rhetoric responsible for what these naughty boys do with the tricks they have learned from him.”^{xi} And that of course is not a sufficient answer, because they have learned the tricks from someone—namely, from Gorgias—and therefore the whole question must be opened on a higher level. And that can no longer be done by Gorgias, whose dignity we must never forget, and who, in addition, is tired. He has talked for hours and hours, and he’s an old man. And therefore Polus takes over. And Polus thinks he has an easy answer, and then the discussion becomes much more interesting from this moment on when Polus takes over—not that Polus was a brighter man than Gorgias; he just was less tired. But still the subject matter becomes more interesting—the question of the relation of justice and speech: Is rhetoric necessarily unjust, as seems to be the case on the basis of the discussion between Socrates and Gorgias? Or has rhetoric in itself a guarantee against injustice? In fuller words, this is the same question: Is rhetoric essentially a ministerial art subject to philosophy and therefore just, or is it an autonomous art, not subject to any higher art? That will become the subject more and more in this dialogue, and it will finally lead to a bipartition of two ways of life: the just life and the unjust life, the way of life of Gorgias and the way of life of Socrates. And, in a way, the dialogue ends without a decision. That is also of some importance for the discussion we had in the first half of this meeting, because Socrates can solve the question¹⁴ in favor of the just life [only] by telling a myth, an incredible story. But he asserts of that myth, that it is not a myth but a *logos*, i.e. a well-founded teaching speech. That is the end of this dialogue

Now the man who is responsible for this change in the situation is Callicles, who is the addressee in the second half of this dialogue. Well, that will we discuss next time.

ENDNOTES

¹ Deleted “as.”

² Deleted “anything.”

³ Deleted “does a man.”

⁴ Deleted “that.”

⁵ Deleted “and.”

⁶ Deleted “whom.”

^{xi} LS clearly paraphrases here.

⁷ Deleted “but.”

⁸ Deleted “LS: Where? Blanton: 453b. LS: Yes?”

⁹ Deleted “if Socrates.”

¹⁰ Deleted “that.”

¹¹ Deleted “we can make.”

¹² Deleted “and says.”

¹³ Deleted “and.”

¹⁴ Moved “only.”